



MAYOR STEVEN M. FULOP

requests the honor of your presence at the

2017
State of the City Address
Ward B

Thursday, March 30, 2017

6:30pm

Casino in the Park
Lincoln Park

RSVP not required. Please check www.jerseycitynj.gov for weather alerts.

Good evening, and welcome to our fourth year of the State of the City Address.

I want to thank the public officials from the state and the county who have joined us tonight; members of the clergy; members of the court; the Jersey City Council who have been partners in everything we do; fellow members of my administration; and, most importantly, you, the residents of this great city.

I want to start by welcoming you to the sixth and final address of this series, which is focused on Ward B. Each year, we are required by ordinance to update Jersey City residents on the progress we are making as an administration. However, this year, we chose to focus on each ward in six different addresses. As we conclude our series tonight, we will continue to work with each community through a series of town hall meetings beginning in April. While we have worked hard to build one Jersey City, we understand that each of our communities require a tailored approach that highlights the local issues most important to you and to your neighborhood. Tonight, I hope to speak to these local initiatives, as well as touch on some of the larger citywide accomplishments and goals.

In July of 2013, I stood in front of City Hall and took the oath of office as the 49th mayor of Jersey City. It was one of the proudest moments of my life, and something I remain thankful for each and every day. As your new mayor, I promised I would work to make you proud, and that is what we have tried to do as an administration for the past three and a half years.

I spoke about bringing jobs to our residents and about bringing investment to neighborhoods west of the waterfront. I talked about the importance of strong schools and the drive to provide all of Jersey City's students with the opportunities they deserve. I was passionate about encouraging new businesses to move into Jersey City, and about how small businesses are the foundation of our local economy. I talked about my commitment to making Jersey City one of the best mid-sized cities in the country, and while we still have more work to do, I believe we have started to reach the benchmarks we set out to achieve.

During those first few moments, on the steps of City Hall, I outlined my plan, and my hope, to build an administration that would truly move our city forward. We have had some incredible successes, as well as some challenging moments, but overall, I am proud to report to you that the state of the city is as strong as ever.

I honestly believe that the success of any government is measured by tangible results, and I know that we have so much we can point to that proves our progress. During the past three and a half years, we have built a city that has become the economic engine of the region; a city that has become an example of innovative solutions to social issues; and a city that has accomplished it all while remaining fiscally responsible to its residents.

We have seen unemployment in Jersey City drop to the lowest rate in 25 years. This has been no coincidence, but rather, has been the result of a deliberate process of working together with

businesses to bring jobs and stability back to Jersey City. On both job creation and small business creation, we are number one in New Jersey. With job creation at the forefront of our policy priorities, we have brought over 7,000 jobs to Jersey City during the past three and a half years, and have seen over 600 new small businesses open here. We certainly have more work to do when it comes to ensuring that these jobs are being made available to all residents, especially groups that have been previously overlooked, but I feel as though we have begun to take important steps forward.

We have continued to lead the state in construction starts, and for the first time we can say that development is not exclusive to one neighborhood. Whether you live on the West Side or in the Journal Square – you have seen the outcome of the hundreds of millions of dollars worth of investment that we have brought in to our city.

Above all, it is important to us that this progress is inclusive, and we have worked hard to ensure that there are opportunities for all residents, in all wards. We have built more affordable housing during the past three years than the previous administration had built in 10. We are making real progress on this issue. This year, we plan to expand on this success, and have committed to 600 affordable units throughout Jersey City this year.

We have continued to invest in housing for our city's veterans as well, and as a Marine, these projects are especially meaningful to me. We were the first in New Jersey to take on Michelle Obama's Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness, and we are well on our way to accomplishing this goal. This past October, we opened a development specifically for homeless and disabled veterans. I want to thank Pat Kelleher of the Hudson County Building Trades for volunteering thousands of construction hours to make this project possible.

This year, we will continue to build on this progress, with an upcoming Ocean Avenue project in partnership with the Jersey City Redevelopment Agency that will add another 20 veteran-priority units.

I am proud of the work we have done to make Jersey City a truly inclusive and progressive place, and I am exceptionally proud that our city has served as a model to others on so many policy initiatives. We were the first in New Jersey to enact paid sick leave legislation; we were the first in NJ to raise the minimum wage to \$15 per hour for our municipal workers; we were the first in NJ to provide trans-inclusive coverage to city employees; we are the gold standard in New Jersey for creation of a model for prisoner reentry programs; and we launched one of the largest bike share programs in the country.

Most importantly though, we have effectively kept our promises to grow our economy, and expand services to our residents, without raising taxes. For three years in a row, residents have seen no municipal tax increases. We are holding the line on taxes despite the fact that we are growing our police force, expanding affordable housing, and investing millions of dollars in city parks. Few cities in New Jersey can make this sort of claim. Not only have we kept taxes flat for

three years, but we have also seen three consecutive years of credit ratings upgrades, further validating our progress. This year, we are committed to keeping this promise yet again, with the announcement tonight of no tax increases for the fourth straight year.

Tonight, I stand before you to deliver the final State of the City of my first mayoral term. I am honored to have been given the opportunity to serve each and every one of our city's residents during the past three and half years.

Each day of this term has brought us closer to defining, and effectively implementing our shared, collective vision for the future of our city. We have never showed signs of slowing, never relied simply on our most noteworthy accomplishments to move us forward, and never stopped working to build one Jersey City, issue by issue, neighborhood by neighborhood.

This past year, we have continued to advance our city, together.

Since the start of this administration, public safety has been at the forefront of our policies and priorities. We know that new jobs, new schools, and new services must be complemented by a strong sense of security in order to be considered successful. We have spent the past three and a half years strengthening our police force and finding innovative solutions to our city's public safety challenges.

I am proud of the steps we have taken to grow our police force to the largest it has been in 20 years. When we first took office in 2013, the Jersey City Police Department was at an all time low of manpower – 779 police officers. It was my goal to expand our police force to over 900 officers during our first term, and I am excited to report that the most recent class of police recruits brings our police force to 922 officers. Tonight, we are joined by some of our police recruits that are currently in the academy. I would like to thank this group for their dedication to our city's public safety, and I ask that they stand and be recognized.

This year, we are committing to further strengthening our police department by hiring two new classes of recruits, which will add 50 new officers to our police force. We have set a goal to grow our police force to 950 officers before the end of my first term. Building a safer city begins with building a strong police force, and I promise we will never stop working towards this goal.

It was only a few years ago that we inherited a police department that did not adequately reflect the diversity of our communities. Unfortunately, this city was ranked last in survey after survey regarding the diversity of our police department. We have come a long way since then, and I am proud that over 70% of the 250 officers we have hired since 2013 have been minorities.

During the past few years, I have come to realize that finding solutions to our public safety issues requires a comprehensive approach, and one that incorporates the input of the city, the local community, and the judicial system. On Tuesday, we had a shooting and homicide. Every single shooting in this city is tragic and I take it very personally because I know that regardless

of the individual's history, there are loved ones that get left behind. In this situation, this young man who died should be alive and in jail. The JCPD has done a great job this year and gun recoveries are up 10 percent, but this story is a sad reminder of the access young people have to guns. And what is more troubling is that in this case I just mentioned, the JCPD arrested this individual just last month with an illegal gun, however, due to the new bail reform from Trenton, possession of illegal guns has been classified as a non-violent crime. I am taking this opportunity today to call on Trenton to change the loophole that allowed this to happen. The only way we can completely turn the corner on preventing this type of gun violence, is if these cases are dealt with by the courts aggressively.

Overall, our approach to public safety is comprehensive, and not only about policing. We understand that there are other facets to public safety including the effectiveness of our fire department, and most importantly, our ability to provide social services to families, and especially children, within our communities. Prevention is often the first step in improving safety, and ultimately, stopping crime.

This comprehensive approach has pushed us to focus on building a strong Fire Department. We proudly have the best Fire Department in the state of New Jersey and our administration continues to invest in the resources needed to make sure our residents are safe. Right now we have 603 firefighters, which is the largest the department has been since 1995 and we have another 51 firefighters in the pipeline to join this year. A better way to think about this is that the previous administration would take off line or disable an average of 4 fire fighting companies per day through 10 years, putting residents at risk. Through working together with the unions, we have not only increased the number of firefighters but we feel that this year we will get to zero companies off line for the fire department, and we have done it all while keeping taxes stable.

As I mentioned earlier, solving our public safety challenges requires a comprehensive approach that is focused on all members of the community, which is why we have prioritized recreation and youth involvement programs as a way to keep our city's students engaged after school. We want our city's youth to use their time outside of school in fun, productive, and, most importantly, safe ways.

That is why we have added over 30 new recreation programs since the start of our administration. Last year, we expanded recreation programming in all six wards, and began collaborating with the Board of Education to bring programming to the city's schools after hours. In addition to conventional activities, such as basketball and soccer, we now have after school programming that includes educational opportunities, engineering workshops, and homework assistance.

One of the most recognized programs we started is our ongoing Jersey City Summer Works Initiative, which is now in its fourth year. This program brings together public sector, private sector, and local nonprofits to provide comprehensive youth employment to over 1,000 students a year in Jersey City. Programs such as this give young people in our communities a chance to

explore different career paths, and learn skills that will help move them forward.

We want to make Jersey City a place that allows children to explore their interests, discover new ideas, and learn in exciting ways. We also want our city's youth to have access to opportunities that will allow them to succeed. Just a few weeks ago, the City Council approved plans for the expansion of the Liberty Science Center, known as SciTech Scity. The \$280 million project will be developed by the science center in conjunction with the city, and will feature a biotech lab, a coding lab, a technology business incubator and a K-12 STEM-focused public school. This is truly a transformative project, and one that will establish Jersey City as the home of the region's premier innovation destination, as well as educate the next generation of students as leaders in the fields of science and technology.

We view the Sci-Tech Scity project as an important long-term investment we are making on behalf of the city. While previous administrations would have simply sold this land for private residential development, we believe that by turning this land into a science, technology and educational destination, we are providing current and future generations with an incredible community asset that will benefit Jersey City for many years to come.

We have made incredible investments in enhancing education overall. During the past three and a half years, we have regained nearly full local control over our public school district in partnership with the Board of Education. After having been controlled by the state for more than twenty years, we are seeing true progress in improving education for all of Jersey City's students. Our city's teachers, administrators, the Jersey City Board of Education and Dr. Lyles deserve credit for this accomplishment.

We know that thriving communities include safe places to live, work and learn, but we also recognize the importance of investing in places to play as well. We have made significant investments in parks and open space in this city, and know that in the past, these valuable community assets were too often overlooked.

Last year, we saw progress with the opening of Berry Lane Park, a project that we pushed through to completion by reallocating city resources and pursuing additional grant funding. This former industrial site is now the city's largest municipal park, and the first to be constructed in decades. When we opened this flagship park, we knew that this park would bring together families from all over the city, and I hope you and your family have had a chance to explore this 17-acre park, with its basketball courts, soccer fields, a football field and a spray park.

Large parks such as this bring together residents from throughout the city, and we are proud of that. However, we are also proud of the progress we have made in the smaller pocket parks throughout this neighborhood, because we know how important they are to this community. We were excited by the renovations of Boyd McGuinness Park, which was in need of serious investment. Thanks to an Open Space grant, we were able to transform this space into a park that can be enjoyed by everyone, from young children to senior citizens. With a spray park,

gardens and a new playground, this has become the type of community asset this neighborhood deserves.

So, as we work to enhance our city through our investments in public safety, education, recreation and parks, it became increasingly important for us to speak directly to the residents of each ward, not only about the state of the city as a whole, but also about the progress we are making in each individual neighborhood. We value the unique qualities of each of our diverse neighborhoods, and understand the individual role each plays as an important piece of the puzzle. We are here at Casino in the Park tonight to talk about the importance of the West Side, and the commitments we plan on making over the next year to move this neighborhood forward.

During the past three and a half years, we have continued to bring development to this neighborhood because we know that the jobs and opportunities that follow will help this community in significant ways. We have seen new residential development begin to occur here, and have seen new businesses begin to realize the strength of the residents and families that call the West Side home.

Last year, the City Council approved a zoning change that would work to create a 'Restaurant Row' on West Side Avenue. This Restaurant Overlay Zone is expected to spur retail development along this commercial corridor, and in turn, increase economic activity and pedestrian traffic, which will help to support existing businesses, while also attracting new businesses into this community. We understand that some of our city's most important main streets require some much needed revitalization, and we know that this zoning change will provide the spark needed to bring more energy into this community, and provide new opportunities for residents.

One of our goals over the next year is to begin the process of creating a Special Improvement District on West Side Avenue, in an effort to solve this neighborhood's litter issues. This is something that has been tried in the past with some resistance. However, we know that in order to solve these issues, we will need to work collaboratively with business owners and the local community. We all want West Side Avenue to be an inviting and clean place, and we hope that by working together, we can accomplish this goal. This past December, through the help of community members like Jodi Drennan, we tripled the number of summonses and fines in Ward B to businesses that are not maintaining their properties. Through enforcement efforts such as this, and through partnerships with the community, we know that this new SID will be a vital part in moving this neighborhood forward. I would like to ask Jodi Drennan to stand and be recognized for her dedication.

Encouraging development that has the ability to transform this neighborhood, while providing opportunities to this community, has been incredibly important to us. We are especially excited for the expansion of New Jersey City University's campus, which will include new housing and retail space. This is one of the largest and most transformative projects in the entire city. This expansion will be located on a 21-acre vacant site along Route 440. As mentioned before, it will

include new residential housing, new student housing, and retail, including a brand new large supermarket for residents on the south side of the city. A project of this magnitude will have an incredible impact, and will bring new opportunities and activity to this underutilized area.

However, our focus on this neighborhood's growth is not only about new development, but rather, is also about protecting the existing housing stock. This is why we have prioritized working with the community to create the city's 5th historic district here in the West Side neighborhood, called the West Bergen-East Lincoln Park Historic District. I know that there was some concern from the neighborhood as to how this designation would impact this community, but I am proud that we were able to move forward on preserving the character of this neighborhood. The district will not only protect these properties, but it will also help to escalate property value for homeowners in this neighborhood.

So, as the West Side begins to experience increased attention, I assure you that we will remain responsible in accommodating its residents. While new development may be exciting for a variety of reasons, we realize that there are concerns about these changes, such as increased traffic. Bearing this in mind, there are traffic studies being conducted in the southern section of this ward, which are aimed at alleviating roadway congestion as this neighborhood continues to grow. This data will serve as the basis for a literal roadmap that is designed to keep traffic flowing smoothly, as we work proactively to ensure that new residents are a welcome addition to the neighborhood.

In conclusion, I want to reiterate what was stated earlier, that the success of any administration is measured by results. During the past few weeks, we have had conversations with each ward, and spoke about the progress we are making throughout the city. From new parking decks, to new parks, to two new police stations, to a new museum in Journal Square, we are building a stronger city, neighborhood by neighborhood. Here in Ward B, we are confident in the potential of this community, as we have seen the interest in investment begin to take shape. The next chapter for the West Side is not only about new buildings or large developments, but rather, is also about stronger partnerships, better city services, and a safer and cleaner neighborhood. I am confident in our ability to accomplish both.

Just as I stood on the steps of City Hall almost four years ago to discuss future priorities for our administration, I stand before you this evening to outline the successes we have accomplished together, as a community.

We did not come here tonight to simply offer a checklist of everything we have done right during the past three and a half years, but rather, we are here this evening to reassure you that we are making incredible progress together, and are moving forward in truly exciting ways.

Most importantly, I wanted to give you an honest assessment of where our administration stands on critical issues that impact your life every day and where we will focus on in 2017. As our city, and our neighborhoods, continue to grow, we promise to never stop improving, and we

hope tonight has served as further proof that we spend each and every day working to move this city forward.

Your presence here tonight shows that you care, and that you are willing to play a role in making our community even stronger. I sincerely thank each and every one of you for this, and I look forward to continuing to work together. I have found that building relationships with residents, and partnerships within the community, has truly been one of the most rewarding experiences of being mayor.

As we look to the future, please know that we will continue to act with personal care and attention, offering everything we have to creating one Jersey City that affords resources and success to all of our residents. With your help and perseverance, even during these politically divisive times, I am certain that we will continue to unite our neighborhoods, and we will all be better for our efforts. Thank you and God Bless Jersey City.